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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
November 30, 2007

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF INTERIOR EMPLOYEE PLEADS GUILTY TO STEALING CO-WORKERS' VACATION PAY

SACRAMENTO--United States Attorney McGregor W. Scott announced today that ROBERT JOSEPH THOM, 45, of Oceanside, California, pled guilty today to ten counts of wire fraud before United States District Judge Edward J. Garcia.

This case is the product of an investigation by the United States Department of Interior, Office of the Inspector General. THOM was employed with the United States Geological Survey as an Information Technology Specialist with his duty station in Southern California. The Headquarters Office is located in Sacramento.

According to Assistant United States Attorney Michelle Rodriguez, who is prosecuting the case, THOM was on the federal government's nation-wide list as a donor recipient for annual leave donations from December 14, 2006 to August 23, 2007. THOM admitted that he lied to the federal government in order to be on this list and to be eligible to receive vacation pay as a donation from other federal government employees. THOM admitted that he fraudulently claimed he had undergone "multiple urgent surgeries" for malignant cancer, submitted false periodic medical reports concerning his so-called post-surgery recovery, and forged fictitious treating physician reports, including a doctor order stating that he needed more time off work to "remain home" and "get plenty of rest". Based on THOM's nation-wide

plea for help in the form of donated annual leave, 30 Department of Interior employees, including at least ten from outside of California, donated over 982 hours of leave (with a value in excess of \$39,954.16) so that THOM could continue to receive a federal government salary and benefits.

THOM is scheduled to be sentenced on February 8, 2008. Prior to accepting THOM's guilty pleas to ten felony wire fraud offenses, Judge Garcia explained that the maximum penalty THOM faces is 20 years imprisonment and a fine of up to \$250,000 on each count. THOM could also receive a three-year term of federal supervised release. However, the actual sentence will be determined at the discretion of the court after consideration of the Federal Sentencing Guidelines, which take into account a number of variables, and any applicable statutory sentencing factors. THOM has agreed to make full restitution to the federal government and/or to the federal employees that he defrauded.

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